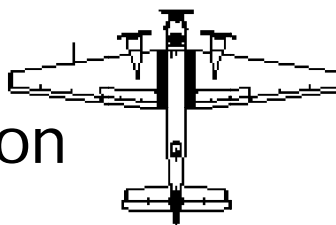


Stalingrad

An Examination of Hitler's Decision to Airlift



JOEL S. A. HAYWARD

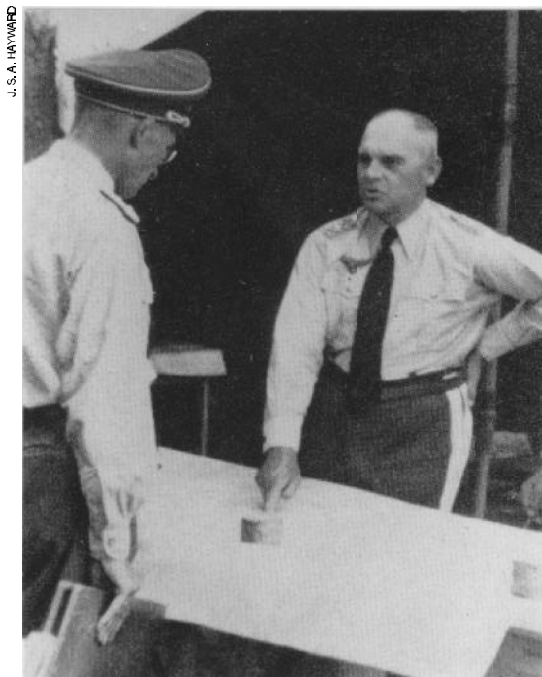


AFTER FEBRUARY 1943, the shadow of Stalingrad ever lengthened ahead of Adolf Hitler. The battle for that city had ended in disastrous defeat, shattering the myth of his military "Midas touch," ending his chances of defeating the Red Army, permanently damaging relations with Italy, Rumania, Hungary, and other allied nations,¹ and, of course, inflicting heavy losses on his eastern armies. More than 150,000 Axis soldiers, most of them German, had been killed or wounded in the city's approaches or ruins; 108,000 others stumbled into Soviet

captivity, 91,000 in the battle's last three days alone. (Although Hitler never learned of their fate, only six thousand ever returned to Germany.)

The battle has attracted considerable scholarly and journalistic attention. Literally scores of books and articles on Stalingrad have appeared during the 50 years since Stalin's armies bulldozed into Berlin, bringing the war in Europe to a close. Most have been published in Germany and, to a lesser degree, Russia, where the name "Stalingrad" still conjures up powerful and emotional imagery.² Comparatively few have been published in the English-speaking world, and

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Generalleutnant Martin Fiebig, in charge of the air corps given the task of keeping Sixth Army alive, repeatedly insisted it was an impossible mission. His views were ignored.

this is understandable. Because no British, Commonwealth, or American forces took part in the battle, they can number none of their own among its many heroes, martyrs, prisoners, and victims. Moreover, although the German defeat at Stalingrad was immediately seen in the West as a turning point, its effects were not directly felt by the Anglo-American nations.

The main focus of Stalingrad historiography, including the dozen books published in 1992 and 1993 to commemorate the battle's 50th anniversary, has been the fighting, encirclement, suffering, and destruction of Generalfeldmarschall Friedrich Paulus's Sixth Army. Few books and articles have devoted adequate attention to the activities of the Luftwaffe, although it made substantial contributions to all battles throughout the 1942 summer campaign—of

which Stalingrad was the climax—and it alone was responsible for the maintenance of Sixth Army after Marshal G. K. Zhukov's forces severed it from all but radio contact with other German army formations. Even fewer works—and none in English—have analyzed in depth Hitler's decision to supply the forces trapped at Stalingrad from the air, even though this decision led to the destruction of those forces after the Luftwaffe failed to keep them adequately supplied.

Of course, most writers on the Battle of Stalingrad do briefly touch on the decision to airlift before launching into their descriptions of Sixth Army's suffering or the Luftwaffe's poor performance. Their treatment of the decision-making process, however, is invariably weak and unpersuasive. Almost all blame Hermann Göring, the Luftwaffe's ineffectual commander in chief. When Hitler asked him what the air force could do, they claim, Göring made rash promises of an airlift, hoping its success would restore his flagging prestige. Lacking dissenting voices and trusting Göring, Hitler went ahead and ordered the airlift. Typifying this line of argument, Generalfeldmarschall Erich von Manstein wrote: "I am unsure whether Göring's frivolous assurances to Hitler were due to a false appreciation of existing capabilities, or of a desperate need for admiration. Whatever the cause, Göring was responsible."³

Many early writers on Stalingrad (including von Manstein), it should be noted, were participants in the events. Their biases and preconceptions are evident in their self-serving, blame-shifting accounts. However, their works were influential in shaping scholarly opinion in the first decades after the war, and their descriptions and explanations have been, with a few exceptions,⁴ accepted uncritically to the present day. In a recent work on Stalingrad, for example, Franz Kurowski repeats many errors and concludes: "What had moved Hitler to give this death order to Sixth Army? During a telephone conversation on 23 November 1942, he asked Göring directly whether the

supply of Stalingrad by air was possible. Göring replied, 'The thing appears feasible.'⁵ Likewise, Samuel Mitcham writes in his own book on the Luftwaffe:

The only way the Reichsmarschall could redeem himself in the Führer's eyes was to score a spectacular military victory. Stalingrad seemed to be his ticket. He promised Hitler that the Luftwaffe would resupply Stalingrad by air It was the major turning point of the war.⁶

Göring was certainly among those responsible for one of the war's most ill-considered decisions, but he does not deserve sole blame, as this study tries to demonstrate. It attempts to recreate the decision-making process from surviving sources—including the diaries of Luftwaffe commanders in the Stalingrad sector, who found their opposition to the airlift ignored by their army counterparts and by the High Command—and tries to determine culpability in a more evenhanded, dispassionate manner than previously attempted.

When the Soviet Fifth Tank and Twenty-first Armies launched their massive counteroffensive northwest of Stalingrad (code-named Uranus) on 19 November, an exhausted Hitler was enjoying a brief holiday at the Berghof, his mountain retreat in Berchtesgaden, southern Bavaria. His relaxation came to an abrupt end that afternoon when he took a telephone call from his headquarters in East Prussia. Clearly agitated, Kurt Zeitzler, chief of the Army General Staff, shouted down the line that hundreds of Soviet tanks had shattered the Rumanian front exactly where Hitler had earlier predicted and that the Rumanian formations were in full flight.⁷ Repeated updates throughout the afternoon convinced Hitler that the situation was serious, although he still felt that Generalmajor Ferdinand Heim's LXVIII Panzer Corps could, if properly deployed, contain the enemy breakthrough. He promptly ordered Generaloberst Maximilian von Weichs, commander of Army Group B, to abandon all further of-

fensive operations within Stalingrad and transfer forces from the city to the broken flank.

When the Soviet Southwestern Front breached the Axis flank south of Stalingrad the next day, Hitler realized that his Fourth Panzer and Sixth Armies were in grave danger of encirclement by the two great pincers. He immediately contacted Generalfeldmarschall von Manstein, whom he considered his best army operational commander. He ordered him to abandon the planned attack at Velikiye Luki in the far north of Russia and to take charge of a newly created command, Army Group Don, in the Stalingrad sector.⁸ Von Manstein was ideal for the job because of his fine strategic mind and unparalleled experience with Rumanian units. Although delighted by Hitler's trust, the field marshal was initially discouraged to learn the composition of his new army group: Rumanian Third Army, which had crumbled wherever struck; Fourth Panzer Army, a large portion of which (including most of its tanks) lay trapped between the quickly closing Soviet pincers; and Sixth Army, completely bottled up. The latter was also worn down after months of constant action, with all battalions far below strength. Hitler did tell the field marshal to expect reinforcements totaling six infantry and four panzer divisions, a Luftwaffe field division, and some flak units. Of these formations, however, only two infantry divisions were at hand. The others would not arrive until early in December.

Göring was certainly among those responsible for one of the war's most ill-considered decisions, but he does not deserve sole blame.

Generaloberst Hans Jeschonnek, chief of the Luftwaffe General Staff, arrived at the Berghof that same day (20 November).

Hitler had summoned him from his headquarters in East Prussia to discuss the air force's role in any attempted breakout or relief operations.⁹ Göring was "too busy" to attend; he was presiding over an oil conference at Karinhall, his country estate in Berlin. No verbatim records of Hitler's conversation with Jeschonnek have surfaced, but the basic facts are known: Hitler explained that Sixth Army would probably be totally cut off within days, that he had organized a new army group under von Manstein, and that it would launch a relief effort as soon as possible. He hoped not only to free Sixth Army within a short time, but also to regain lost territory and rebuild a strong defensive line. Apparently understanding Sixth Army's encirclement to be temporary, Jeschonnek assured Hitler that if both transport planes and bombers were used, and if adequate airfields inside and outside the pocket could be maintained, the Luftwaffe could airlift sufficient supplies to the army. After all, he pointed out, the air force had successfully sustained one hundred thousand men in the Demyansk pocket for several months during the previous winter.

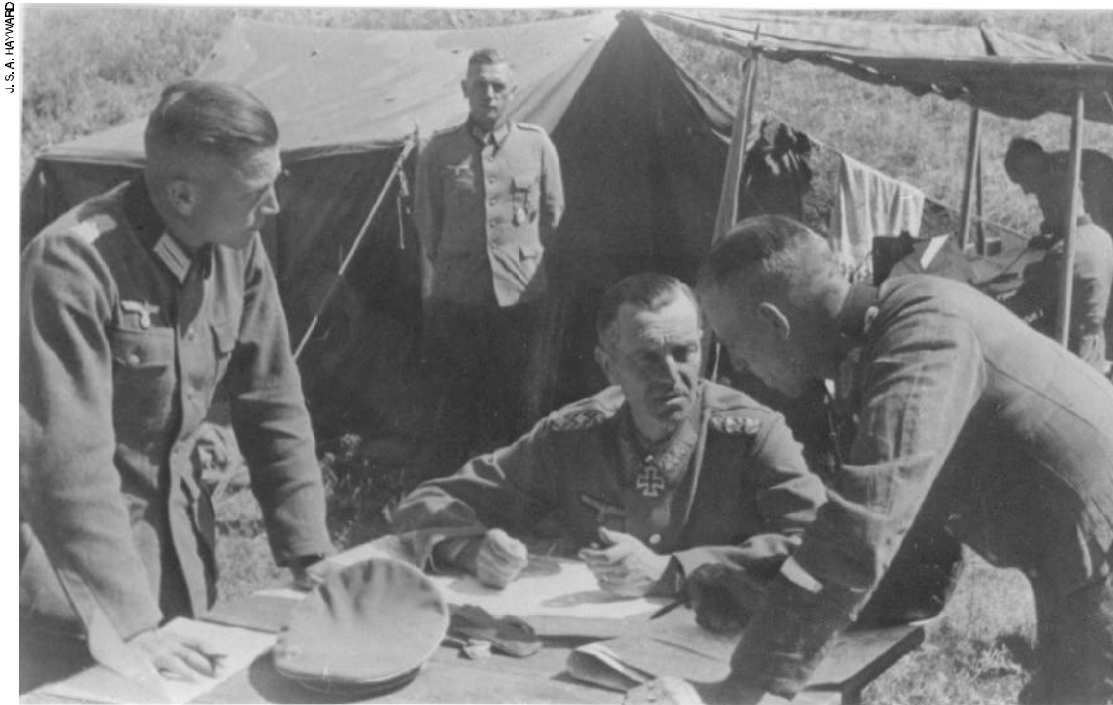
The [Luftwaffe] had successfully sustained one hundred thousand men in the Demyansk pocket for several months during the previous winter.

The comparison with Demyansk was specious, as Jeschonnek himself probably realized as soon as he had time to think through the issues (seldom possible when dealing with Hitler, who always wanted immediate answers to his questions). The one hundred thousand men of II Army Corps trapped at Demyansk had required no less than three hundred tons of supplies per day.¹⁰ Because of low operational rates caused by winter conditions, the Luftwaffe had been forced to

commit almost five hundred Junkers Ju-52s to the airlift in order to ensure that sufficient planes—around 150—could carry that tonnage each day.¹¹ Further, the presence of the VVS (Voyenno-vozdushnyye sily, the Soviet Air Force) at Demyansk had been negligible, allowing almost uninterrupted German air operations with low losses.¹² The situation at Stalingrad was very different. First, almost three times as many men were encircled there than had been at Demyansk. If one hundred thousand men had needed three hundred tons of supplies per day, then, logically, 250,000 men would need around 750 tons, an almost impossible tonnage to deliver (as calculations made at Hitler's headquarters a few days later confirmed).¹³ Second, the Luftwaffe did not possess anywhere near enough transport aircraft and available bombers to deliver such tonnages. Third, VVS forces at Stalingrad were now far stronger than they had been at Demyansk. They would greatly hamper airlift operations and inflict high losses.

Jeschonnek's spontaneous and ill-considered assurance that the air force could sustain Sixth Army at Stalingrad pleased Hitler. He could hardly allow the army to abandon that city after he had proclaimed to the entire German nation in September that "you can be certain no one will get us away from there!"¹⁴ and, only two weeks earlier, had trumpeted in the Munich Löwenbräukeller that his forces had taken that "vitally--important city . . . with Stalin's name," where the "real" war was being fought.¹⁵ Unable to eat his words, Hitler now found himself committed to holding Stalingrad. On the afternoon of the 21st, therefore, he sent a message directly to Paulus, ordering him to stand firm "despite the danger of temporary encirclement." He was to hold open the rail link as long as possible. "As to airlift," he added, "orders will follow."¹⁶

Neither Hitler nor Jeschonnek envisaged an airlift of the Demyansk scale or duration. They still thought that von Manstein would soon break the encirclement and restore the



A cautious commander with little tactical imagination, Friedrich Paulus (center) lacked the strength of character and decisiveness needed to state dissenting views to Hitler. His failure to do so was taken by Hitler as support for his decisions.

southern front. Sixth Army would only need to be supplied by air in the meantime. Yet that is clearly not the way army commanders in the field, faced with the grim realities of their predicament, interpreted Hitler's references to an airlift. Sixth Army's senior officers felt that unless they broke out immediately (which they unsuccessfully advocated), their army would have to be supplied by air for weeks, if not months. They stated that it would need 750 tons of supplies per day (reducing this figure to five hundred tons within a few days). Their statements to this effect horrified local Luftwaffe commanders, whose depleted units would have to carry out the airlift.

Later that day (21 November), Generalleutnant Martin Fiebig, commander of Fliegerkorps VIII, the Luftwaffe corps responsible for all air operations in the Stalingrad

sector, telephoned Generalmajor Schmidt, Sixth Army's chief of staff, to discuss the army's intentions. Paulus listened on another phone. Fiebig's report on this conversation reveals the tension that quickly developed between army and air force commanders when the former readily embraced Hitler's suggestion that the air force would keep alive the trapped army:

In response to my questions about Sixth Army's intentions, General Schmidt replied that the army commander proposed to deploy his army in a hedgehog [that is, all-around] defense of Stalingrad Regarding the possibilities of this hedgehog defense, I asked how they planned to keep Sixth Army supplied, especially when the supply line from the rear looked certain to be cut very soon. General Schmidt replied that supplies would have to be carried in by air. I replied that

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Hitler shaking hands with Generaloberst Wolfram Freiherr von Richthofen in Russia, mid-1942. The two got on famously, although Hitler never learned until much later that von Richthofen strenuously opposed the decision to airlift.

supplying an entire army by air was impossible, particularly when our transport aircraft were already heavily committed in North Africa. I warned him against exaggerated expectations. Generaloberst Paulus entered the conversation occasionally on his other telephone line. Next morning, at 0700, I telephoned General Schmidt again, telling him that he was counting too strongly on air supply. I stressed to him again that, after long deliberations, based on my experience and knowledge of the [limited] means available, supplying Sixth Army by air was simply not feasible. Further, the weather and enemy situations were completely unpredictable factors.¹⁷

Another prominent air leader shared Fiebig's view: the highly decorated Generaloberst Wolfram Freiherr von Richthofen, commander of Luftflotte 4, the air fleet in charge of all Luftwaffe operations in southern Russia (including the Ukraine, the Cri-

mea, the Black Sea, the Caucasus and, of course, the Stalingrad sector). Von Richthofen's views carried far more weight than those of Fiebig, his subordinate. Not only was he considered to be Germany's leading operational air commander, but he was also liked and respected by the person who mattered most: Hitler himself. In fact, Hitler admired von Richthofen, a committed National Socialist, aggressive commander, inspiring leader, forthright adviser, and loyal follower.

Von Richthofen considered it sheer madness for Paulus and his staff to plan an all-around defense at Stalingrad and pin their hopes on the Luftwaffe to sustain their army. The air force simply lacked the ability to keep it supplied, he frantically warned everyone who would listen. "Sixth Army believes that it will be supplied by the air

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Von Richthofen repeatedly insisted to senior army commanders and the High Command that his air fleet could not possibly sustain Sixth Army by airlift. His warnings fell on deaf ears.

fleet in its hedgehog positions," he complained in his diary on the 21st.¹⁸ "I make every effort to convince it that this cannot be accomplished, because the necessary transport resources are not available." During "dreadfully many telephone calls . . . until late in the night," he emphatically insisted to almost every relevant air force and army leader—including Göring in Berlin, Zeitzler in East Prussia, Jeschonnek at Berchtesgaden, and von Weichs at Army Group B headquarters—that he lacked the means to supply Paulus's army. It should immediately attempt to break out.¹⁹ His protests fell on deaf ears and, despite several requests, no one would put his call through to Hitler.

The following day, Generalmajor Wolfgang Pickert, commander of the 9th Flak Division and the senior Luftwaffe officer trapped in

the pocket, echoed these sentiments to Paulus and Schmidt during a conference in Nizhne-Chirskaya, attended by these generals and Generaloberst Hermann Hoth, Fourth Panzer Army's commander. According to Pickert's subsequent version of what transpired (the only surviving account), Schmidt asked him at one point what he thought should be done. "I would gather together all the forces I could and break out to the southwest," the flak general bluntly replied. Schmidt explained that Hitler had expressly ordered Sixth Army to stand fast at Stalingrad, that the army lacked sufficient fuel for a proper breakout attempt, and that the terrain itself complicated matters. The Soviets held higher ground to the west, meaning that Sixth Army would be exposed to their guns if it attempted to break out. Such an attempt would have to be made without heavy weapons, in any event, because of the fuel shortages. Moreover, it would be necessary to leave 15,000 sick and wounded soldiers to their fate. For these reasons, Schmidt added, a breakout would probably turn into a "Napoleonic catastrophe."²⁰

Pickert rejected this as "nonsense," insisting that a breakout was the only solution. His flak forces could help considerably, he added. He had numerous heavy batteries for covering fire, and his men could carry his 20 mm flak guns (160 of them) and their ammunition across the steppes. "No," Schmidt concluded, "the army has been ordered to stand fast at Stalingrad. As a result, we shall form hedgehog defenses and expect supplies from the air." The flak commander, who apparently had no knowledge of Fiebig's previous debate with the army on the matter, was flabbergasted. "Supply an entire army from the air?—absolutely impossible! It simply cannot be done, especially in this weather." Despite repeatedly pleading with the Sixth Army to break out and explaining at length the reasons why the Luftwaffe could not keep it supplied, Pickert was unable to persuade the army. Paulus had remained silent throughout the discussion, but finally told the airman the two most important things in his

mind: that Hitler had ordered him to stand fast, and that a breakout attempt with the means available would probably only end in disaster. Schmidt remained adamant about the airlift. "It simply has to be done," he stated, adding that his men would do their bit to cut down the supply level by eating the thousands of horses within the pocket.²¹

Thus, Luftwaffe commanders in the field were unanimous both in their belief that the air force could not supply the entire Sixth Army and in their condemnation of the idea to local army commanders and to the High Command itself. They eventually made several converts, most notably Zeitzler (as will soon be shown) and Generaloberst von Weichs, commander of Army Group B. The latter had listened carefully to von Richthofen's arguments. Persuaded, he sent a teletyped message to the High Command on 22 November.²² The prompt withdrawal of Sixth Army was essential, he said, especially because "the supply by air of the twenty divisions that constitute this army is not possible. With the air transport available, and in favorable weather conditions, it is possible to carry in only one-tenth of their essential daily requirements." Von Weichs added that although a breakout would "entail heavy losses, especially in materiel," it was the only viable option and would, if successful, "result in favorable developments in the situation as a whole."

Von Richthofen considered it sheer madness for Paulus and his staff to plan an all-around defense at Stalingrad and pin their hopes on the Luftwaffe to sustain their army. The air force simply lacked the ability to keep it supplied, he frantically warned everyone who would listen.

Several of the army corps commanders bottled up in Stalingrad also agreed that the war was over for them if the High Command refused a breakout and ordered an airlift. On 22 November, while Pickert was battling Paulus and Schmidt in Nizhne-Chirskaya, a meeting between corps commanders took place at Gumrak, within the pocket.²³ Acting on his own initiative, Walther von Seydlitz, commander of LI Army Corps, summoned the other corps commanders—Generals Erwin Jaenicke of IV Army Corps, Walter Heitz of IV Army Corps, Karl Strecker of XI Army Corps, and Hans Hube of XIV Panzer Corps—to discuss the situation. They all agreed that they must gather all their strength for an attempt to break through the encirclement. They scheduled their attack for the 25th and, in agreement with von Weichs (but not with Paulus, who had no knowledge of their plans at that stage), began regrouping for the operation.

However, Paulus—like his chief of staff—was apparently not persuaded by the airmen's warnings. He vacillated throughout the 22d and 23d, afraid to contradict Hitler's order to stand fast even though he knew his opportunities for a successful breakout were disappearing with every passing hour. On the 22d, he did request "freedom of decision in the event of failure to construct southern defensive positions." Yet, totally ignoring von Richthofen's, Fiebig's, and Pickert's logical arguments against an airlift, he stated that as long as he could close his exposed southern front "and receive ample airborne supplies," he intended to hold the area still in his possession.²⁴ Next evening, in response to Hitler's fresh order to construct all-around defensive positions and await relief from outside, the general replied with another teletype message. This time he did allude to mounting opposition to the proposed airlift, but said only that "timely and adequate supply has been ruled out."²⁵ His army must break through the encirclement to the southwest, he stated, because it was now suffering acute fuel and ammunition

shortages and increasing enemy attacks against certain sectors. As the army could not hold out for long, he again requested "freedom of decision." His five corps commanders, he added, shared his views on the situation.

Hitler's ears were now deaf to such pleas. His mind was firmly made up. After arriving back at his East Prussian headquarters on the 23d, he replied to Paulus by radio in the early hours of the 24th. Sixth Army (which he now designated "Fortress Stalingrad") would stay and defend itself vigorously. "Air supply by a hundred more Junkers is getting under way," he said, trying to reassure the frantic army commander.²⁶ By now, Hitler's notion of an airlift operation had changed considerably since Jeschonnek had first assured him that Sixth Army could be supplied by air. He had then described the army's encirclement as temporary, and Jeschonnek had made his rash assurance with that in mind. Now he clearly envisaged a Demyansk-style airlift, only even larger and longer lasting. "Sixth Army will stay where it is," he yelled at Zeitzler in the evening of the 23d, according to the latter's postwar account. "It is the garrison of a fortress, and the duty of fortress troops is to withstand sieges. If necessary they will hold out all winter, and I shall relieve them by a spring offensive."²⁷

The firmness of Hitler's conviction that the "fortress" should stand fast and that the Luftwaffe could keep it adequately supplied had grown considerably in the two days since Jeschonnek had first mentioned it. One of the main reasons for his increased conviction was the almost unanimous support for the decision expressed by those around him. At Berchtesgaden, and during his long train journey to East Prussia on the 23d, Hitler had no contact—personal or telegraphic—with the army and air force commanders at the front. During that critical decision-making period, he did not speak to von Richthofen, Fiebig, or Pickert, whose air forces would have to carry out the massive supply operation and who were now frantically warning

almost everyone else that they lacked the means to sustain Sixth Army. Nor did he communicate with von Weichs, who shared their view and advocated an immediate breakout. Hitler learned of their views from Zeitzler, who had finally "come around" and now defended their assessment. Yet, because their warnings were not delivered personally, but only passed on by the army's "overanxious" chief of staff, they carried little weight. Hitler merely accused Zeitzler of being too pessimistic and advised him to stop paying heed to "defeatist" commanders who couldn't see the forest for the trees.

The military advisers accompanying Hitler—his faithful paladins, Wilhelm Keitel and Alfred Jodl, and their skeleton staffs—were in no position to make detailed assessments or offer informed advice.

The sycophantic Keitel, who seldom expressed views contrary to Hitler's, acted true to form throughout this crucial period. "The Volga must be held! . . . Sixth Army must hold out!" he repeatedly told Hitler. Although Jodl was no lackey, despite the efforts of many postwar writers to paint him as one, he was still smarting from the rough treatment Hitler had dished out when he sided with Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm List against him in September. He was not yet ready to receive more. He therefore gave Hitler far more cautious but still agreeable advice: although Sixth Army was certainly in a predicament, he argued, and its destruction looked certain if relief was not forthcoming, the vast territorial gains made during the summer campaign should not be abandoned before von Manstein's relief operation was attempted. In the meantime, the Luftwaffe should keep the army supplied.

Aside from Zeitzler's, the only dissenting voice Hitler heard during his last two days in Berchtesgaden and his long journey north to East Prussia belonged to Jeschonnek, who had abandoned his earlier position and now meekly suggested that Sixth Army should break out.²⁸ He regretted his earlier assurances to Hitler. Almost as soon as

the words were out of his mouth, he wished he could swallow them again. After having his staff check his figures and after talking with von Richthofen several times by telephone, he quickly realized that nothing close to adequate logistical support of Sixth Army by air would be possible, even with consistently favorable weather and taking no account of VVS action. He and von Richthofen were close friends, but the latter clearly dominated their relationship and, when they disagreed on matters, usually managed to win Jeschonnek over. This was clearly one such case. However, although Jeschonnek notified Hitler that he might have been too hasty when he made his earlier assessment, his retraction carried no weight. Not only did Keitel and Jodl believe Sixth Army should stay, Hitler retorted, but Jeschonnek's own superior, Reichsmarschall Göring, had now given his personal assurance that the air force could fully meet the army's supply needs.

Responsibility for the decision to supply Sixth Army . . . rests with three individuals: Jeschonnek, Hitler, and Göring.

Determining when Göring first specifically assured Hitler that the Luftwaffe could supply the army is difficult because of the paucity of reliable and detailed sources. However, David Irving, who has reconstructed Göring's movements in this period, believes that Hitler had first phoned him on 21 November, a full day after Jeschonnek had made his rash promise and shortly after Hitler had first mentioned the airlift to Paulus.²⁹ This view gains support from von Richthofen's diary description of a discussion he had with Hitler at the "Wolf's Lair" on 11 February 1943, almost two weeks after Paulus surrendered and his surviving troops staggered into Soviet captivity. Hitler ad-

mitted to von Richthofen that Göring was not entirely to blame for the failed airlift; he had himself promised Sixth Army that it would be supplied by air, "without the Reichsmarschall's knowledge."³⁰

When Göring first discussed an airlift with Hitler on 21 November, he lacked up-to-the-minute information on Sixth Army's encirclement and statistical data with which to make air supply calculations. He therefore gave no specific assurances about his force's airlift tonnage capabilities, insisting instead that Sixth Army should stand fast and that, as Jeschonnek had said the previous day, the Luftwaffe would do all in its power to meet the army's needs. As soon as he got off the phone, he summoned his quartermaster staff and ordered every available transport plane—including his own courier flight—to be mobilized for the operation. Göring's actions are remarkable, considering that he had not yet studied detailed data or consulted air supply experts. He later told von Richthofen that at the very beginning of the Stalingrad episode, he had played the optimist and supported Hitler in his decision to stand fast there.³¹ At that point, von Richthofen added, Göring had still believed Sixth Army's encirclement to be temporary.

Göring's assurances became much stronger on the following day (22 November), when he arrived in Berchtesgaden. Hitler asked his bulky deputy whether he still supported the air-supply proposal. Göring replied confidently, "Ja, it can be done." He could give no other answer, he later told Generaloberst Bruno Lörzer, his close friend, because the Nazi leader used the worst kind of emotional blackmail:

Hitler said to me: "Listen here, Göring. If the Luftwaffe cannot carry this through, then Sixth Army is lost!" He had me firmly by the sword-knot. I could do nothing but agree, otherwise the air force and I would be left with the blame for the loss of the army. So I had to reply: "Mein Führer, we'll do the job!"³²

He could hardly have rejected the airlift proposal anyway, he lamely explained afterwards to Paul Körner (undersecretary of state for the Four Year Plan), because his own chief of staff had already convinced Hitler that the air force could supply the encircled forces. "Hitler already had Jeschonnek's papers before I set eyes on them," he told Körner, doubtless trying to shift some blame to his chief of staff. "I could only say, 'Mein Führer, you have all the figures. If they are correct, then I place myself at your disposal.'"³³

Jeschonnek's original figures were not accurate, however, as Göring learned just hours later. Oberst Eschenauer, Jeschonnek's supply officer, informed his boss that the standard "250 kg" and "1,000 kg" air-supply containers on which he based his calculations actually carried only around two-thirds of those loads.³⁴ Their names derived solely from the size of the bombs they replaced on bomb racks. Jeschonnek, an honest man who admitted his mistakes, immediately told Göring, and asked him to warn Hitler that their calculations were based on incorrect data. Göring winced when his young chief of staff confessed to this error, but, believing it was "too late now," expressly forbade him to tell Hitler. Instead, he phoned Hitler, repeated his unconditional assurances that the Luftwaffe could do the job and invited him to phone Generalfeldmarschall Erhard Milch, his deputy and Air Inspector-General, if he still felt unsure. When Milch finally learned of this in 1946, he angrily scrawled in his diary: "Deceit plus incompetence equals one Reichsmarschall! I guessed it already, but now I get proof of it, it makes me want to throw up all over again."³⁵

According to Zeitzler's postwar claims, after Hitler arrived back in East Prussia late next evening—23 November—he vigorously tried to persuade Hitler that Göring's promises were impossible to keep. After explaining at length the tonnages required and the lack of aircraft to carry them, Zeitzler told Hitler that "having examined the facts in de-

tail, the conclusion is inescapable: it is not possible to keep the Sixth Army supplied by air."³⁶ Hitler remained outwardly calm, but, with annoyance evident in his voice, stated, "The Reichsmarschall has assured me that it is possible." When Zeitzler stood his ground, Hitler sent for the air force chief. "Göring," he asked, "can you keep the Sixth Army supplied by air?" The airman raised his right arm and said, "Mein Führer, I assure you that the Luftwaffe can keep the Sixth Army supplied." Hitler cast Zeitzler a triumphant glance, but the general refused to back down. "The Luftwaffe certainly cannot," he insisted, to which Göring angrily retorted, "You are not in a position to give an opinion on that." Hitler was surprised by the undisguised hostility between his commanders, but granted Zeitzler permission to challenge Göring's promises. "Herr Reichsmarschall," he said. "Do you know what tonnage has to be flown in every day?" Caught off-guard, the embarrassed air leader spat back, "I don't, but my staff officers do." Zeitzler had come armed. His own staff had made detailed calculations, which he immediately summarized:

Allowing for all the stocks at present with Sixth Army, allowing for absolute minimum needs and the taking of all possible emergency measures, the Sixth Army will require delivery of three hundred tons per day. But since not every day is suitable for flying, as I myself learned at the front last winter, this means that about five hundred tons will have to be carried to Sixth Army on each and every flying day if the irreducible minimum average is to be maintained.

"I can do that," Göring shot back. Losing his temper, Zeitzler shouted: "Mein Führer! That is a lie!" Hitler thought for a minute before replying: "The Reichsmarschall has made his report to me, which I have no choice but to believe. I therefore abide by my original decision [to supply the army by air]."

Zeitzler's frequently cited description of this argument with Göring should not be treated as a verbatim record because it is

J. S. A. HAYWARD



Generalleutnant Erich von Manstein initially thought Sixth Army should remain at Stalingrad, supported by the Luftwaffe, until he could mount a relief operation. His report to this effect hardened Hitler's resolve that the Luftwaffe would have to keep Sixth Army alive and operational.

based on his subjective recollection of the exchange and was apparently not written down until the following day. However, the account is almost certainly an honest attempt at reconstructing the event. Zeitzler's open opposition to the airlift is mentioned in several reliable sources, including von Richthofen's diary, as is his courage to express opinions contrary to Hitler's. But placing this account chronologically within this crucial decision-making period poses problems. Zeitzler himself could not remember the date, noting only that it took place "between 22 and 26 November."³⁷

Most writers place the argument in the early hours of 24 November—that is, shortly after Hitler arrived from Berchtesgaden and

shortly before he issued his fateful order to Paulus that his army must stand fast, that a relief operation was being launched, and that the Luftwaffe, bolstered by "a hundred more Junkers," would keep the army supplied.³⁸ If the argument did occur at that point, then it represents the last major appeal to Hitler to change his mind and the most weighty challenge to Göring's unconditional assurances that his air force would meet the trapped army's supply needs. It shows not only that Hitler had already firmly made up his mind before he arrived back in East Prussia, but that his deputy's embarrassing unfamiliarity with the tonnage he had promised to supply should have raised grave doubts in his mind about the reliability of those promises. Before it was too late, Hitler should have reexamined the tables and graphs drawn up by Jeschonnek, Zeitzler, and the army quartermaster-general; and he should have spoken to von Richthofen, whose air fleet was to carry out the air supply operation.

However, the argument with Zeitzler did not take place on the 24th, before the airlift began. It could not have. After Göring visited Hitler at the Berghof on the 22d, he departed for Paris in "Asia," his luxurious command train. He spent the next four days—when he should have been organizing the airlift—visiting Parisian art dealers and galleries.³⁹ Von Richthofen was appalled. "I urge Jeschonnek and Zeitzler to report my views to the Führer," he wrote in his diary on the 25th, "and to harness the Reichsmarschall, but he's in Paris!"⁴⁰ Göring arrived back at Hitler's headquarters in Rastenburg on the 27th, and his heated exchange with Zeitzler probably took place at that point; that is, three days after Hitler had given the final go-ahead for the airlift. Despite the claims of numerous writers, therefore, the argument played no part in the decision-making process. The die had already been cast.

Hitler's decision to keep Sixth Army at Stalingrad and support it from the air until a relief operation could break its encirclem-

ent was poorly received by the commanders in the field. Von Richthofen again tried desperately to convince everyone who would listen that Hitler must be given an honest appraisal of the facts. He phoned Jeschonnek (three times), von Weichs, and Zeitzler, once more pleading with them to have his views made known to Hitler (which they did, to no avail).⁴¹ He was disappointed by what he correctly perceived to be Jeschonnek's lack of courage in Hitler's presence, noting that "Weichs and Zeitzler share my view. Jeschonnek has no view at all." He was most upset the next day to learn that the airlift would proceed, despite their warnings:

The Führer heard everything we had to say, but decides against it because he believes the army can hold on and he does not think we could reach Stalingrad again. I stand by my own opinion. Still, orders are orders and everything will be done pursuant to the orders received. It is tragic that none of the locally-responsible commanders, although purportedly possessing [the Führer's] confidence, has any influence at all now. . . . As things are at present, operationally speaking, we are nothing more than highly-paid non-commissioned officers.⁴²

Von Richthofen was stunned that the High Command expected him to fly in at least three hundred tons per day. "We supply [the pocket today] with all our Ju-52s, but we only have 30 available for that." He added in his diary on the 25th:

Of yesterday's 47 Ju 52s, 22 made sorties [into the pocket]; of today's 30, 9 made sorties. We flew in 75 tons today, instead of the 300 tons ordered by the High Command, which is not possible with the few Ju 52s available. I report[ed] this to the Reichsmarschall.

Von Seydlitz, commander of LI Army Corps, also complained that Hitler's order was impossible to fulfill. He sent Paulus a lengthy report, which warned that there could be no question of standing firm: "The army has a clear choice: it must break through to the southwest in the gen-

eral direction of Kotelnikovo or face destruction within days."⁴³ The army's supply situation, he insisted, would decide the matter. To believe the Luftwaffe could keep the army supplied was grasping at straws, especially since only 30 Ju-52s were at hand and, even if the other hundred aircraft Hitler promised actually materialized, they could still not meet the army's needs in full. Unfortunately, von Seydlitz's report contained several careless inaccuracies which robbed it of its persuasiveness. He stated, for example, that even one thousand tons of supplies per day would not be sufficient, whereas Sixth Army's own quartermaster had just reported that the army could survive if the Luftwaffe carried in five hundred tons each day (three hundred cubic meters of fuel and two hundred tons of ammunition).⁴⁴ Schmidt and Paulus still sent the report to von Manstein, adding that, although they disagreed with many of von Seydlitz's reasons, they shared his view that the army should break out immediately.

Unfortunately for all those opposed to Hitler's "stand fast" and airlift decisions, von Manstein made his own thorough assessment of the situation and sent the High Command a far more optimistic appraisal.⁴⁵ His position was similar to Jodl's: while he agreed that a breakout was the safest course, and that the army remained in danger if it stayed in its present positions, he was not convinced by Army Group B's insistence on an immediate breakout. If a relief operation could start in early December, he argued, and if the promised reinforcements arrived in time, it was still possible to save the army. Of course, he cautioned, if it proved impossible to launch the relief operation or meet the army's supply needs by air, then it should break out. Hitler felt vindicated. He highly valued von Manstein's opinions (as did most of his senior officers), and proudly informed Zeitzler and his other advisers that the field marshal's assessment was far more in keeping with his own views than those of his "defeatist" generals. The debate was over; he had won—for now.

Thus, responsibility for the decision to supply Sixth Army—one of the most fateful decisions of the war—rests with three individuals: Jeschonnek, Hitler, and Göring. Jeschonnek rashly made the first assurances that the Luftwaffe was capable of meeting the army's logistical needs before he had consulted air transport experts, made detailed calculations of his own, or sought the views of von Richthofen and the other air force and army commanders at the front. Their evaluations of the situation and the capabilities of their respective forces would have been far more detailed and reliable than the situation assessments made by Hitler and his entourage (thousands of kilometers away in Hitler's alpine retreat in southern Bavaria), whose main source of information was Zeitzler's telephone "updates." Jeschonnek should have requested a little time to do homework before presenting an opinion on the matter.

When Jeschonnek gave his initial assurances to Hitler, however, he believed that the army's encirclement would be temporary and, therefore, that its long-term survival did not depend on the air force's ability to keep it supplied. Had he known then that Sixth Army would need supplying for several weeks, if not several months, he certainly would not have promised Hitler anything without extensive research. To his credit, when he did learn that Sixth Army's encirclement would last longer than originally claimed, that von Richthofen and Fiebig forcefully opposed the airlift, and that his own hasty calculations were inaccurate, he immediately admitted his mistakes and tried to dissuade Hitler and Göring. He lacked both a forceful personality and the respect of his bosses, so, as a result, they simply ignored his warnings. Jeschonnek's culpability, then, stems from rashness, a faulty original assessment of the situation, and an inability to stand up to stronger personalities. It does not stem from dishonesty or incompetence.

When considering Hitler's responsibility for the decision to supply Sixth Army by

air, one should note that he was unable to focus solely on that matter. He had to divide his attention between events at Stalingrad and what he mistakenly perceived to be the equally critical situation in North Africa. Only a fortnight after Gen Bernard Montgomery launched his offensive against Erwin Rommel's positions at El Alamein and four days after his army captured them (which threw Hitler into a fit of rage), major Anglo-American landings took place in Morocco and Algeria on 8 November. French resistance quickly collapsed, and subsequent events forced Hitler to launch Operation Anton, the occupation of Vichy France, on the 11th. To make matters worse, he felt he needed to pour scores of thousands of troops into Tunisia to counter the advance of Anglo-American forces pushing eastward towards Rommel's Afrika Korps, still falling back westward before Montgomery's Eighth Army. Anton quickly reached its successful conclusion. Yet, when Stalin launched Operation Uranus on 19 November, events were still going very poorly for German troops in North Africa and Hitler's mind was focused on their survival and, he hoped, on operations to restore the situation. Thus, distracted by events in the Mediterranean, Hitler was unable to focus his attention solely on the grave situation in the east. Had he chosen to concentrate on Stalingrad and the security of the Don/Donets region, strategically more important than Tunisia, he may have made different choices than the ones that eventually led to the loss of an entire army.

Deciding to supply Sixth Army by air was not Hitler's only mistake. His decision to pour men and equipment into Tunisia during this critical period rates as one of the worst he ever made. As historian Vincent Orange noted, "The campaign, however prolonged, could have only one result: an Axis defeat."⁴⁶ The Allies, he explained, "enjoyed command of the sea, the air and an enormous advantage on land in numbers of troops, tanks, guns and supplies of all kind (especially fuel)." Thus, the 81,000 German troops

landed in Tunisia between November 1942 and January 1943,⁴⁷ plus the 250 Ju-52s used to transport them, were wasted in a campaign with little strategic value and no chance of success. Those men and aircraft could have made a crucial difference to German fortunes in the far more important Don/Donets region had they been sent to von Manstein and von Richthofen instead.

Hitler's responsibility for the airlift outweighs Jeschonnek's. First, his own initial perceptions about the developing encirclement and the fate of Sixth Army were not based on rationality, but egotism. His "iron will" alone had saved his eastern armies during the previous winter, he believed. It would do so again. This explains his comment to Zeitzler on the first night after he returned to East Prussia. "We must show firmness of character in misfortune," he lectured. "We must remember Frederick the Great."⁴⁸ Second, he also considered it essential to stand fast at Stalingrad because he could not withdraw, without losing face, from the "strategically-important" city that he had publicly vowed several times to keep. Third, because Jeschonnek's assurances supported his own preconceptions, he uncritically accepted them, although the airman had clearly not reflected or conducted research before making them. Fourth, from the moment he received those assurances, which suited his own views so well, Hitler closed his mind to alternative strategies. Fifth, he totally ignored the repeated appeals and warnings of his frontline army and air force commanders, unfairly calling them "defeatists" because they challenged the inflexible, "stand fast" formula that he had elevated to the status of doctrine. Sixth, he accepted Göring's promises and reassurances as uncritically as he had accepted Jeschonnek's, despite the fact that Reichsmarschall Göring had a poor track record, had exercised only nominal command of the Luftwaffe during the last year, instead delegating the force's day-to-day running to his subordinates, and, despite the crucial nature of the present situation at

Stalingrad, had evidently made no real effort to familiarize himself with the issues involved. Lastly, he did not sack Göring and replace him with someone competent, or even demand that he act responsibly in this critical period. He should at least have forbidden him (in von Richthofen's words) "to swan off to Paris to plunder art galleries" and ordered him to stay in Rastenburg to organize and oversee the Stalingrad airlift, the largest in military history, upon which hung the lives of a quarter of a million men.

Göring's responsibility for the airlift decision equals Hitler's. When the Nazi leader first asked him whether the Luftwaffe could, as Jeschonnek had promised, fully meet Sixth Army's logistical needs, he should not have given an immediate answer. He should first have consulted his air transport experts, studied all available information on the situation at Stalingrad (enemy strengths and activities, the size and state of trapped forces, the condition and capabilities of Luftflotte 4, weather patterns and projections, and so on) and sought the opinions of von Richthofen and the Fliegerkorps commanders involved. Remarkably, Göring failed to do this, not only before making his first assurances, but also before making his final promises prior to leaving for Paris.

Göring aggressively dominated his own staff, driving two of his senior officers to suicide (Ernst Udet in November 1941 and Jeschonnek in August 1943). Yet, he proved incapable of standing up to Hitler. He rarely even expressed views contrary to Hitler's (at least in the latter's presence), especially after his obvious failure to defeat Britain from the air and to defend Germany's cities from ever-increasing Allied air attacks. These failures had steadily reduced his standing in Hitler's eyes throughout 1941 and 1942. Instead, he lapsed into subservience, hoping his slavish loyalty would repair their relationship. It is probable, then, that Göring's unconditional assurances that his air force could maintain Sixth Army stem from his inability to resist Hitler or challenge his views ("I gained the impression that he was

afraid of Hitler," Milch once wrote⁴⁹⁾ and from his intense desire to restore his tattered prestige.

Hermann Plocher argued that Göring "may also have sincerely believed that he could accomplish the airlift operation to satisfaction, just as he had done in some instances in the past, by combining the influences of his several offices and adding his own brutal energy."⁵⁰ Plocher was wrong. Göring did not "sincerely" believe that he could do the job, otherwise no sense can be made of his comments to Lörzer that Hitler had him "by the sword-knot" and that he could "do nothing but agree" because he did not want to "be left with the blame." Also, his refusal to inform Hitler that Jeschonnek's original calculations were based on false premises and information removes any suggestion of "sincerity." He deliberately withheld embarrassing but important information from Hitler. Additionally, at no point during the course of the airlift did he throw his "brutal energy" into making sure it succeeded. On the contrary, rather than stay and organize and oversee the crucial operation himself, he disappeared to Paris on a shopping trip and then, on his return, only rarely attempted to involve himself in its progress.

To sum up, then, this article shows that Hitler's decision to leave Sixth Army

trapped in Stalingrad with the Luftwaffe supplying it until a rescue attempt could be launched is more complex than presented in books on these events. First, more people were involved in the decision-making process than just Göring and Hitler, and the final decision itself was not spontaneously made during the first discussion between those two. It evolved during several discussions between Hitler and his closest military advisers, several of whom gave poor counsel and prevented Hitler from hearing personally from those with dissenting views, especially von Richthofen, clearly the person best informed about Luftwaffe capabilities in the Stalingrad sector. Contrary to popular claims, the decision was not reached after Göring "duped" Hitler. No, thanks to Jeschonnek and the useless advice of Keitel and Jodl, Hitler already had it firmly in mind before he even spoke to the bulky demagogue. His fear of public humiliation, coupled with his stubborn inflexibility (which he called his "iron will") quickly transformed the airlift—really only one of several alternative strategies that he should have explored properly—into the only course of action. Those same subjective factors led him to ignore the dissenting voices of commanders he ordinarily trusted and to listen to those of men he held in low regard.

Notes

1. For the effect of the defeat on Hitler's allies, see Jürgen Förster's *Stalingrad: Risse im Bündnis 1942/43 Einzelschriften zur militärischen Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Freiburg: Rombach, 1957), 16.

2. An excellent treatment of Stalingrad historiography and the lasting effects of that battle on the collective memory of Germans and Russians is W. Wette and G. R. Ueberschär, eds., *Stalingrad: Mythos und Wirklichkeit einer Schlacht* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1992); also see Jürgen Förster, ed., *Stalingrad: Ereignis—Wirkung—Symbol* (Munich: Piper, 1992).

3. Erich von Manstein, *Verlorene Siege* (Bonn: Athenäum, 1955), 347.

4. J. Fischer's "Über den Entschluss zur Luftversorgung Stalingrads: Ein Beitrag zur militärischen Führung im Dritten Reich," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 2 (1969): 7-67, is the best published study of the "decision to supply Stalingrad by air," although it makes no use of the diaries of Milch, von

Richthofen, Fiebig, and Pickert, all used in the present study. David Irving's works on the Luftwaffe deal only briefly with the decision to airlift, but contain many valuable insights and place blame fairly.

5. Franz Kurowski, *Stalingrad: die Schlacht, die Hitlers Mythos zerstörte* (Bergisch Gladbach: Gustav Lübbe, 1992), 298. See Kurowski's earlier *Luftbrücke Stalingrad: Die Tragödie der Luftwaffe und der 6. Armee* (Berg am See: Kurt Vowinkel, 1983), 32-37, and *Balkenkreuz und Roter Stern: Der Luftkrieg über Russland 1941-1944* (Friedberg: Podzun-Pallas), 310; and Williamson Murray, *Strategy for Defeat: The Luftwaffe, 1933-1945* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Air University Press, 1983), 151.

6. Samuel W. Mitcham, *Men of the Luftwaffe* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1988), 184.

7. Fischer, 10.

8. Manstein, 326.

9. For Jeschonnek's meeting with Hitler, see postwar statements by the airman's staff—especially "Frau Lotte Kersten, damals Sekretärin bei Generaloberst Jeschonnek" and "Oberstleutnant Leuchtenberg, damals Adjutant des Generaloberst Jeschonnek"—in *Aussagen zum Problem der Luftversorgung von Stalingrad*, United States Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama (hereafter cited as USAFHRA), file no. K113.106-153.

10. Fritz Morzik, *German Air Force Airlift Operations*, USAF Historical Study 167 (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: USAF Historical Division, Air University, 1961), 145.

11. *Ibid.*, 150.

12. *Ibid.*, 157-60.

13. P. E. Schramm, ed., *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht (Wehrmachtführungsstab), 1940-1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Bernard & Graefe, 1961), vol. 2, 25 November 1942, 1019; Cajus Bekker, *Angriffshöhe 4000: Ein Kriegstagebuch der deutschen Luftwaffe, 1939-1945* (Gräfelfing vor München: Urbes Verlag Hans Jürgen Hansen, 1964), 363.

14. M. Domarus, *Hitler: Reden und Proklamationen, 1932-1945* (1965; reprint, Leonberg: Pamminger, 1988). The speech of 28 September 1942 is in vol. 4, 1912-14, of the reprint edition.

15. *Ibid.*, 1933-44, esp. 1937 (speech of 9 November 1942).

16. Manfred Kehr, *Stalingrad: Analyse und Dokumentation einer Schlacht: Beiträge zur Militär- und Kriegsgeschichte*, Band 15 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1974), 163.

17. Feldgericht des VIII. Fliegerkorps, Br. B. Nr. 7143, gKdos, Im Felde, den 26.1.1943, gez. Fiebig, appended to *Tagebuch-Generalleutnant Fiebig (Stalingrad)*, 25.11.1942-22.2.1943, in USAFHRA, file no. 168.7158-335.

18. Dr. Wolfram Frhr. von Richthofen, *Persönliches Kriegstagebuch*, Band 9, 1.1.-31.12.1942, 21 November 1942, in *Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (Federal Military Archives)*, Freiburg, Germany, N671/9. Hereafter cited as BA/MA.

19. *Ibid.*

20. My description of the conference is drawn from Pickert's notes ("Aufzeichnungen aus meinem Tagebuch und von Besprechungen über operative und taktische Gedanken und Massnahmen der 6. Armee"), appended to his diary, USAFHRA file no. 168.7158-338: *Aufzeichnungen des Generalmajor Pickert, Kommandeurs der 9. Flak-Division und Generals der Luftwaffe bei der 6. Armee*, aus der Zeit vom 25.6.42-23.1.43) as well as from later correspondence between Pickert and Hans Doerr, USAFHRA file no. K113.309-3, vol. 9; and from an essay written by Pickert to Hermann Plocher in 1956 (same source).

21. *Ibid.*

22. OB HGr B an OKH/Chef GenStdH vom 23.11.1942, betr. Zurücknahme der 6. Armee, gez. von Weichs, published as Doc. 9 in Kehr, 561.

23. H. Schröter, *Stalingrad: "... bis zur letzten Patrone"* (Lengerich: Kleins Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, n.d.), 85.

24. AOK 6/Ia an HGr B vom 22.11.1942, 1900 Uhr, betr. Lage und Absicht der Armee, published as Doc. 6 in Kehr, 559-60.

25. Paulus an Hitler vom 23.11.1942, betr. Notwendigkeit des Ausbruchs der 6. Armee, FuSpr (Entwurf) OB 6. Armee, gKdos Chefs. an OKH, nachr. HGr. B, vom 23.11.1942, 2130 Uhr, published as Doc. 10, *ibid.*, 562.

26. Führerentscheid vom 24.11.1942, betr. Halten der Stellungen der 6. Armee und Einsatzstoss. FS OKH GenStdH/Op. Abt. (I/5B) Nr. 420 960/42 gKdos Chefs. vom 24.11.1942, 0140 Uhr, aufgenommen bei AOK 6 um 0830 Uhr, published as Doc. 11, *ibid.*, 562.

27. K. Zeitler, "Stalingrad," in W. Kreipe, G. Blumentritt et al., *The Fatal Decisions: Six Decisive Battles of the Second World War from the Viewpoint of the Vanquished* (London: Michael Joseph, 1956), 142.

28. David Irving, *Hitler's War* (London: Papermac, 1977), 456; and Göring: *A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 369.

29. *Ibid.*, 367.

30. Von Richthofen, *Persönliches Kriegstagebuch*, Band 10, 1.1.-31.12.1943, 11 February 1943. BA/MA N671/10.

31. *Ibid.*, 10 February 1943.

32. Bericht über eine Auskunft über Görings Stalingrader Zusage durch Generaloberst Lörzer (Befragung Hamburg-Othmarschen, 16 April 1956, durch Prof. Dr. Richard Suchenwirth, Karlsruhe). USAFHRA file no. K113.309-3.

33. Staatssekretär a.D. Paul Körner über Jeschonnek (Befragung am 19.9.1955 in München), USAFHRA file no. K113.309-3, vol. 9.

34. Milch Taschenkalender, 21 May 1946, part of the Irving microfilm series *Records and Documents Relating to the Third Reich*, distributed by Microform (Wakefield) Ltd., microfilm DJ-57.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Generaloberst Zeitler über das Zustandekommen des Entschlusses, Stalingrad aus der Luft zu versorgen (Briefliche Beantwortung vom 11.3.1955 folgender von Prof. Suchenwirth mit Brief vom 3.3.1955 gestellter Fragen); Zeitler, "Stalingrad," USAFHRA file no. K113.309-3, vol. 9, 144-45.

37. *Ibid.*

38. For Hitler's instruction to Paulus, see note 26. For the placing of the Zeitler-Göring confrontation on 24 November, see Matthew Cooper, *The German Air Force, 1933-1945: An Anatomy of Failure* (London: Jane's, 1981), 251; Bekker, 363; Paul Carell, *Stalingrad: The Defeat of the German 6th Army* (Atglen, Pa.: Schiffer, 1993), 170.

39. Irving, *Göring*, 369-71.

40. Von Richthofen, *Persönliches Kriegstagebuch*, Band 9: 1.1.-31.12.1942, 25 November 1942, BA/MA N671/9.

41. *Ibid.*, 24 November 1942.

42. *Ibid.*, 25 November 1942.

43. Gen d. Art. v. Seydlitz-Kurzbach, HG des LI. AK, an den OB der 6. Armee vom 25.11.1942, betr. Stellungnahme zum Armeebefehl vom 24.11.1942. Abschrift des AOK 6 für ObKdo HGr Don: Der KG des LI. AK Nr. 603/42 gKdos vom 25.11.1942, bei HGr Don 28.11.1942, published as Doc. 15 in Kehr, 564-67.

44. AOK 6/OQu vom 24.11. an OKH/GenQu, HGr B/OQu, und vom 25.11.1942 an HGr Don, betr. Bedarfsanforderung für Luftversorgungsgüter, published as Doc. 16, *ibid.*, 567.

45. Manstein an OKH/Op Abt vom 24.11.1942, betr. Beurteilung der Lage der 6. Armee. FS (Abschrift) ObKdo der HGr Don/Ia Nr. 4580/42 gKdos Chefs. vom 24. 11.1942, ca. 1300 Uhr, published as Doc. 14, *ibid.*, 564.

46. Vincent Orange, *Cunningham: A Biography of Air Marshal Sir Arthur Cunningham* (1990; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Center for Air Force History, 1992), 128 (also see 127).

47. George F. Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1957), 683.

48. Zeitzler, "Stalingrad," 132.

49. Irving, *Göring*, 381.

50. Hermann Plocher, *The German Air Force versus Russia, 1942*, USAF Historical Study 154 (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: USAF Historical Division, Air University, 1966), 276. Although dated, muddled, and inaccurate in places, Plocher's discussion of these matters is among the best in English.

**Sit down before a fact as a little child, be prepared to give
up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and
to whatever abyss nature leads or you shall learn nothing.**

—T. H. Huxley